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ABSTRACT

In Iowa, shared superintendency originated in the 1980s as a response to the agricultural recession of the 1980s which had tightened Iowa's public school finance. Iowa lost 80,000 people through out-migration and about 10,000 fewer births occurred, while the school student population decreased by 181,670 during this same period. While nearly every school district in the state has been touched by these declines, rural areas and smaller schools have tended to lose the greatest percentages of population. To continue to provide high quality educational programs, Iowa schools have initiated changes. Encouraged by state legislative financial incentives, many school districts are currently sharing grades, teaching staff, and administrators. By the 1989-90 school year, the number of districts sharing their principal administrator increased to 102. This paper reports on a study examining the effects of sharing of superintendents by school districts. The basic design of the research was a qualitative study using a structured interview format. The information centered on these areas: (1) the financial motives; (2) the challenges of sharing a superintendent; and (3) lessons learned from the experience. Thirty-one percent of the 83 respondents indicated that there was no advantage associated with sharing superintendents; 69% identified such advantages as cooperative purchasing and coordinating curriculum. Every respondent identified at least three weaknesses associated with the shared position. The most commonly identified weakness was the amount of time it took to manage both districts. This paper contains 20 references. (ALL)

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The Iowa Shared Superintendency: The School Board President's Perspective

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Abstract

The Iowa Shared Superintendency:
The School Board President's Perspective

Based on the findings of an earlier study in which forty-two shared superintendents were interviewed, the researchers interviewed eighty-three school board presidents who were involved with a shared superintendent. The investigation attempted to answer crucial questions associated with the effectiveness of such an administrative arrangement. Questions such as why did the district become involved in such an arrangement, what were the advantages and disadvantages of having a shared superintendent, and what "words of wisdom" would be given to other boards of education who may be interested in pursuing such an administrative arrangement were asked.

The researchers gained valuable insight into board presidents' perceptions and expectations for such an administrative arrangement. Even though there were differing perceptions and expectations there were some common threads that wove themselves through this administrative phenomena. The results of this investigation have identified the crucial need for open and frank communication among all parties and a vision for the future that will enhance the educational program for all students affected by such an arrangement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Appreciation is extended to the College of Education, The Graduate College, the College of Education Research and Development Center, and the Department of Educational Administration and Counseling at the University of Northern Iowa for their financial support of this research study. Without their support the rich body of knowledge gained would not be available.

And finally, a special thanks to the Iowa Association of School Boards for publishing the final product. It is hoped that the information contained in this document will aid in the understanding of an emerging new administrative phenomena that appears to be expanding within the state of Iowa.

R.H.D.
N.L.M.

The Iowa Shared Superintendency:

The School Board President's Perspective

INTRODUCTION

During the 1988-89 academic year the researchers conducted an investigation of the shared superintendent position from the practitioners' point of view. Many interesting concepts where identified by shared superintendents as they worked through this relatively new administrative arrangement. Results of this investigation surrounding the practitioner prompted the researchers to further investigate the shared superintendency through board presidents' perceptions about the shared superintendency. This new experience, shared superintendencies, originated during the last decade due to economic and demographic realities affecting education. Iowa is a state whose fortunes are inextricably linked to agriculture. The social fabric of many communities was devastated as family farms were foreclosed, banks filed for bankruptcy, and small businesses folded for lack of customers during the agricultural recession of the 1980's.

As pointed out in the first investigation, the trends in population demographics have had a direct impact on public school environments. Iowa lost 80,000 people between 1980 and 1987 and the birth rate statistics indicated 10,300 fewer babies were born during this same period. The U.S. Census Bureau projects a further decline of 215,384 people during the current decade. The advent of low birthrates and out-migration have resulted in continual and sometimes drastic decreases in student population. Since the high water mark

in student enrollment in the 1969-70 school year (659,880) this population has decreased by 181,670. While nearly every district in the state has been touched by these declines, rural areas and smaller schools have tended to lose the greatest percentages of population.

Further entanglement of the issue evolved in the 1989 state legislative session when a new state aid formula was passed and mandated program requirements for all schools were established. The new state aid formula will be phased in over the next few years with total implementation due by the 1994-95 school year. Many of the mandated program requirements have already been implemented however, other requirements will be phased in by the 1992-1993 school year.

Faced with changing demographics and legislative enactments, Iowa schools have been re-shaping themselves to continue to provide high quality educational programs. Encouraged by legislative financial incentives, many school districts are currently sharing grades, teaching staff, and administrators. This follow-up study allowed the researchers to further examine this administrative phenomenon and its impact on education in the state of Iowa.

In the 1984-85 school year, 4 districts shared a superintendent. In 1987-88 the number of districts sharing a superintendent rose to 67. In 1988-89 the figure had risen to 88. During the 1989-90 year there were 102 school districts who shared a superintendent. Of the 102 school board presidents who were involved in sharing a superintendent, 83 were interviewed an 81.37% response.

METHODOLOGY

Prior to the study, the researchers talked both formally and informally with superintendents, principals, and board members about the trends in Iowa public education. Such discussions which helped the researchers realize the need for this study. Furthermore, the discussions helped generate a list of questions which were used as a foundation for the interviews:

* What were the board's feelings going into the shared superintendency arrangement?
* What were the circumstances which caused the district to become involved with a shared superintendent?
* Describe the district's experiences with the shared superintendency: both the positive and negative aspects.
* What factors caused the discontinuance of the shared superintendency?
* How has the shared superintendency changed the job of the building principal?
* What would the board's words of wisdom be to existing boards of education contemplating entering the shared superintendency arrangement?
* Would the district be willing to become involved with a shared administrative arrangement again, knowing what you have learned in the present experience?
* To what extent is the shared superintendency an end or a means to survival for small/rural school districts?
* If your district could modify or influence the existing legislation involving shared administrators, what would you or your district say or do?

The basic design of the investigation was a qualitative study utilizing the structured interview format. Whenever possible the interview was audio taped for future reflection by the researchers. Three categories of school districts were identified from the Iowa Association of School Boards reports: those districts which had shared a superintendent at one time but were no longer involved in such an agreement; those districts which were involved in administrative sharing prior to the 1989-90 school year; and those districts which were new to the shared superintendency for the 1989-90 school year.

A number of structured interviews were arranged by appointment and conducted in the conference/board room of the Iowa School Board Association offices in conjunction with the Iowa School Board Association Convention. The remaining interviews were conducted at school sites or regionally designated sites around the state when the researchers and subjects were able to agree on an appropriate time. Where the researchers and subjects were unable to meet face to face, a telephone interview was conducted. The average interview time was 30 minutes. The shortest interview took 15 minutes and the longest took 53 minutes. All of the structured interviews were conducted between November, 1989 and May, 1990.

The research questions that formed the framework of the investigation were as follows:

1. To what extent, if any, were there financial motives for public school districts to enter into a sharing agreement?
2. What unique challenges have been identified by board presidents involved in the shared superintendent arrangement?
3. What lessons have been learned for those who may entertain similar arrangements in the future?

As the researchers interviewed the subjects, and upon subsequent analysis of the audio tapes, some common themes emerged. The remainder of this report will focus as well as answer the research questions raised by the investigators.

FINDINGS

Research Question #1

> To what extent, if any, were there financial motives for public school districts to enter into a sharing agreement?

In light of the economic and demographic developments in Iowa, each board president participant was asked the reasons why their district chose to share a superintendent. In 9 out of 10 interviews, the principal reason was financial. Due to existing state legislation which offers financial incentives for districts which engage in sharing practices, many districts found a way to use such monies to partially or fully fund the superintendent's annual salary. A legislative formula was derived that enabled a school district to claim up to 15 additional students and allow two districts together to claim up to 25 additional students. The additional number of students claimed would then be multiplied by the state identified cost per pupil to generate the additional incentive funding. For the 1990-91 academic year the Iowa cost per pupil is $2978 which translates into approximately $75,000 additional funding for districts which can together claim the maximum number of additional students. As the state cost per pupil rises, the funds available for districts sharing administrators also increases, making the administrative sharing concept more attractive for financially troubled districts.

In districts where the student populations were high enough the financial incentives were less attractive. In these cases the boards were looking to improve the educational program of the district by accumulating additional dollars through sharing a superintendent. Boards of education generally viewed these incentive dollars as a way to provide programs that were previously thought to be too expensive for the district to operate. Some districts increased faculty, curriculum coordinators, support staff, or hired additional administrators with the incentive money in an effort to enhance the educational program.

Some school board presidents indicated that the shared superintendency was a logical progression following previous successful sharing programs. The success of other sharing arrangements made the decision to share a superintendent easier when the opportunity arose. As superintendents retired or moved to other positions boards contemplated, and in some cases agreed, that a new sharing arrangement would be in the best interest of both districts. Many board presidents, expressed the opinion that this was one way to further bring the two districts together for an eventual merger.

Boards and Communities Attitudes

The majority of board presidents interviewed indicated that their boards felt very comfortable with the decision of having a shared superintendent. A few board presidents expressed their board's desire to continue with their own superintendent but the deciding factor was either present financial concerns, the foresight of eventually closing the district due to financial reasons or not being able to meet the increasing program requirements for all Iowa schools. In many school districts the boards felt very confident that the new administrative arrangement would work. Others were apprehensive because it was

a break from tradition or because one of the participating boards of education held the existing superintendent contract and the other board had to purchase the services of the superintendent. The school district which purchased the services of the superintendent and did not hold the contract was more inclined to be apprehensive about the out come because it would not have a superintendent who would live in the community and their access to the individual would be reduced to that of a part-time administrator. The lack of visibility and accessibility cautioned some districts into questioning whether an arrangement such as sharing a superintendent would be successful.

However, when a decision was made to share a superintendent, both districts entered into a legal agreement stipulating the conditions of the sharing arrangement. In the state of Iowa this legal type of arrangement is considered a 28-E agreement. These contracts ranged between a 50-50 and 75-25 percent split. Affected superintendents would spend anywhere between one-half to three-fourths time in either districts depending on the specific arrangements worked out by the participating boards of education.

The majority of the superintendents maintained hard and fast schedules, spending time in each district proportional to the contract agreement. For continuity some superintendents spent the same two and one-half days in each district each week, while others worked out some form of rotation over a two-week period. In the majority of cases the boards approved a flexible schedule that allowed the superintendent to divide their time in a manner most appropriate, regardless of the contract. It was understood by the boards of education that emergencies could arise and that extra time in a particular district may be required for appropriate administration. Therefore, in the case where two districts had a 50-50 agreement, a superintendent might decide to spend the entire week in one district if he/she felt it was necessary.

When asked if the local community supported the board's decision to become involved in a superintendent sharing arrangement, the participating board presidents overwhelmingly indicated community support for such an arrangement. Many board presidents indicated that there was not 100 percent support, but that there was majority acceptance. Only in a few circumstances was there community disapproval which precipitated open meetings and petitions not to enter into an agreement. In many instances there was no opposition from the community in the form of newspaper editorials, unusually high community participation at board meetings, or informal community pressuring of board members through telephone contacts or street conversations.

Research Question #2

> What unique challenges have been identified by board presidents involved in the shared superintendency arrangement?

Discussion about this question includes the strengths and weaknesses of the shared superintendent position as well as the impact of such positions on the role of building principals within the shared district. As one would expect, from the numerous responses obtained, common threads that appear in the majority of interviews are reported.

Strengths of the Shared Superintendency

Many board presidents indicated that the major advantage of sharing a superintendent was receipt of additional dollars from the state. Many of those presidents could not identify any other advantage to sharing a superintendent. Other participants said that there were no strengths associated with the arrangement. Still others identified cooperative purchasing efforts to hold down

the cost of equipment and supplies as an advantage. Districts who were seriously considering grade sharing or who were already in a grade sharing arrangement found the shared superintendency a valuable arrangement in regards to unifying the curriculum and eliminating duplication of effort between the districts. In an effort to keep open the channels of communication related to future sharing options, the ability of the shared superintendent to develop a positive public relations program for both districts as well as to keep each board of education informed about problems was perceived as a strength. Those boards interested in pursuing the shared relationship beyond that of the superintendency found the shared superintendent an invaluable asset. A strong sentiment was expressed that the shared superintendent provided such boards, with a systematic approach to strategic planning toward unification of the districts.

The forced sharing of responsibilities by district personnel has been viewed by some board presidents as a unifying factor in bringing the district closer together in its goal of establishing an educationally sound school district that will be able to function in the future. While the bringing together of the districts was perceived as a major strength, many board presidents commented that time constraints forced the superintendent to delegate more responsibilities to other central administrative staff or to building principals. The superintendents were in most cases, unable to maintain the level of specific responsibility that they had as a one district superintendent. Board presidents felt that faculty and staff became more involved in decision making with respect to curriculum, classroom management, or supervisory responsibilities that affected their assignment.

Weaknesses of the Shared Superintendency

The participants of this study indicated numerous perceived weaknesses in sharing a superintendent. The following is a compilation of what board presidents indicated as disadvantages:

* The position became a burn-out situation due to more board meetings, committee meetings, and overall running of two separate districts.
* There was an indication that the shared superintendent needed to have a very strong background in finance or have a school business manager.
* The position was extremely time consuming.
* In many instances the superintendent had to negotiate for two separate school districts.
* Districts who were accustomed to having a full-time superintendent had a difficult time adjusting to a part-time person.
* A majority of participants interviewed indicated that there was a high level of stress and the individual needed a high level of energy for the position.
* The district which purchased the services of the superintendent felt that the time spent getting to know the superintendent was a disadvantage over the district who knew the superintendent and held the original contract.
* It was difficult for some communities and school personnel to accept the fact that the superintendent was not visible and available when needed. Board presidents reported that faculty in particular felt that they were being "short changed" because the superintendent was not around as much.

* The board presidents identified communication within and between districts as an increasing problem and concern because small problems which could have been handled with immediate communication had turned into large problems which took a great deal more time to resolve.
* Although some board presidents indicated that sharing a superintendent was a weakness, they also indicated that such sharing was better than the alternative (reorganizing the district).
* There were indications that a district did not always get a fair representation, in the form of information, from the superintendent, especially if the district did not hold the superintendent's contract.
* A few presidents were unhappy because they felt their district was not getting their fair share of the superintendent's time as set forth in the agreement.
* Boards felt they were not getting the opportunity to have as much input as they had previously because of short-cut decision making on the part of the superintendent.
* Some boards, usually those which purchased the superintendent services from another district, felt a lack of loyalty on the part of the superintendent.
* Some districts which were sharing a superintendent held joint board meetings which did not allow for the boards to operate independently of each other.
* Some participants indicated that it was a disadvantage when the superintendent did not live in their district.
* The lack of public relations within the district.

The Building Principal

Numerous and divergent responses were given to whether the building principal's role had changed due to the superintendent being shared. It appeared that the differences centered around the perception and expectation of the principal prior to the superintendent being shared. If the district believed in site based management or some modification of this concept the answer to the question was that the position did not change significantly. The principal was already performing many of the tasks associated with the responsibility of running an individual school program. Also if the district had already established district wide positions such as maintenance, food service, transportation, etc., the building principal was not perceived as having additional responsibility to see that such programs were maintained.

However, in districts (usually very small districts) where there were no additional central office or district wide staff, the building principal's job description changed to reflect added responsibilities. Depending on the number of principals in the district and their previous experience in such areas as food service, transportation, buildings and grounds, etc., principals could expect at least building responsibilities for these areas and, in many situations, they were given district-wide responsibilities. In most cases where the principal was given added responsibilities the board of education increased the principal's salary from $1000 to $8000 per year and extended the contract year. There were a few indications that principals were given added responsibilities without salary increases or extended yearly contracts.

Note: Some of the board presidents who were interviewed indicated that the board felt a need to monitor the operation of the school district more closely since they had a part-time superintendent who had less time to keep them informed. Some boards felt that this was a strength while others viewed it as a weakness. The board's perception of their role was related to whether they felt such involvement was a strength or a weakness.

Research Question #3

What lessons have been learned for those who may entertain similar arrangements in the future?

The individual experiences of board presidents' are reflected in their responses to this research question. Three sub-questions were asked to garner desired information. They were:

A. Would your district willingly become involved in a shared superintendency again?

B. What "words of wisdom" would you give to an existing board of education which may be considering the shared superintendency?

C. In your opinion, what does the successful shared superintendent look like? In other words, what characteristics does the shared superintendent need that will make him/her a successful shared superintendent.

A total of 77 of the 83 participants (93%) indicated that they believed their district would be willing to become involved in a shared superintendency again given their present experiences. The six remaining participants agreed that it was only out of necessity for the salvation of the district that they entered such an arrangement.

Virtually all of the participants expressed a need to be open-minded when considering a shared superintendent. Many participants expressed that their advice to others would be to go slow and make sure that there was good communication with the local community. Many board presidents felt that the support of the local community was crucial for the superintendent to be successful.

The following additional statements were made by the participants as they responded to the question of what would you tell another board president or board which is considering a shared superintendent:

* Board members must have positive attitudes about the shared superintendent position.
* Each board should look at their long-range plan and identify if the other district has the same vision for the future and then spend time together to determine the areas of compatibility.
* Visit with a shared superintendent from another district to find out about the position.
* Talk with a board president that has a shared superintendent.
* Develop a specific job description and decide if the person can handle what is expected.
* Establish a committee from each district to meet and "iron out" all of the issues and concerns before entering into such an arrangement. It is very difficult to discuss issues and concerns during an open meeting of both boards.
* Check specifics (such areas as amount of time in each district, travel expenses, salary considerations, which district will hold the superintendent's contract, etc.) about the agreement between districts and between districts and superintendent.
* Make certain that each board knows what it is giving up.
* Make sure the person who will be accepting the position is not forced into such an arrangement.
* Both districts should have strong support staffs who receive training in the responsibilities that a shared superintendency brings to each district.

* Start with sharing other things first (athletics, teachers, courses, etc.).
* Be prepared to receive criticism about the superintendent being less accessible to the staff and community.
* Success depends on the superintendent's abilities.
* Be sensitive to the loss of the other district.
* Have a thick skin in order to deal with those that do not agree with the sharing decision.
* The shared superintendency should not be perceived as a long term venture for either district.
* Hire a consultant, who can be more objective about the crucial problems and issues that must be addressed during the development of such a position.

Within the parameters of the third research question the investigators asked what the successful shared superintendent looked like. What were the characteristics of such a person? The following information was gathered from the participants' responses:

* The individual needs to be well qualified, have 5-10 years experience as a superintendent, be willing to take criticism, and to stand up for beliefs, and be a good business manager.
* The person must be able to make decisions and have positive public relations, including frequent attendance at school activities within both districts.
* The person must be organized, aggressive in pushing for excellence, and a delegator.
* The person must be both an effective communicator and an active listener.

* The person must be open, honest, and a real people person.
* Many participants believed that the shared superintendent should be a younger person who is ambitious, energetic, confident, a go-getter, and somewhat of a workaholic who is perceptive and has high integrity.
* This person was identified as having good group dynamics, a high stress tolerance, flexibility, and a sense of humor.
* The successful shared superintendent was viewed as a visionary leader who stayed ahead of the board and showed no favoritism to either district.
* The person should try to stay in touch with the students and staff and maintain a high degree of visibility.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The primary purpose of the study was to add to the body of knowledge related to the administrative phenomenon in the state of Iowa known as the shared superintendency. Faced with changing demographic patterns, economic conditions and legislative enactments, Iowa schools have been re-shaping themselves to continue to provide quality educational programs. Many school districts, encouraged by legislative financial incentives are currently sharing grades, teachers, and administrators. This follow-up to a practitioner study of 1989 has allowed the researchers to further examine the impact on of this administrative structure on education in the state of Iowa. While Iowa has unique characteristics and programs which must be considered when examining the findings of this study, the information thus gained should help individuals contemplating employment of a shared superintendent in their district.

Motives for Such an Agreement

Having interviewed 83 of the 102 Iowa school board presidents who shared a superintendent during the 1989-90 school year, the researchers feel they have gained valuable insight and information about the shared superintendency. Almost without exception, the primary reason interviewees gave for sharing a superintendent was a financial advantage. Many small rural school districts viewed the state financial incentives as a way of saving money and maintaining their school during a period of rising costs and increased educational program mandates.

In some cases where one of the shared districts was large enough to have its own superintendent, the board entered into a sharing partnership for a couple of other reasons. The larger district felt a moral obligation to assist a smaller neighboring district which was viewed as needing help. Such reasoning is not foreign to Iowa's rural cultural where neighbors help one another. Possibly a more compelling reason was the vision of the larger district to increase their student population to ensure a more balanced educational program. The larger districts envisioned increased student population as a means of ensured security against what is perceived in the state as the demise of small rural schools. They were also prepared to use the incentive money to add additional personnel such as curriculum coordinators, supervisors, and additional staff in order to meet the requirements of new mandates as well as an expanded educational program. The incentive dollars were not viewed as a savings to these districts but as an avenue for better education for a larger proportion of their student constituency.

When two districts of equal size investigated sharing a superintendent there usually was debate and discussion within the communities about such a

venture. Many times this debate became heated, and in some situations divided the community and/or the board of education. It was evident that the larger districts which shared a superintendent did not have the significant debate as was viewed in smaller districts. Many of the board presidents who represented districts which held the superintendent's contract felt more secure about the final outcome of such a sharing venture. Board presidents of districts which "bought into a contract" expressed less confidence about an anticipated successful outcome because they perceived themselves as having less control. There was some expression that the larger district was going to "swallow up" the smaller district.

Shared Superintendency: pro or con

For many board presidents the answer to whether the shared superintendency was good or bad was quick and definite. Many responded that the only good came in the form of additional dollars. The majority of these responses came from board presidents in very small districts which were having trouble meeting state-mandated educational programs and were operating on severely limited finances. Other board presidents who had a different vision saw their community and district entering into a positive partnership with a neighboring school district, and believed the superintendent would assist in unifying the districts and eliminating duplication of effort. Many board presidents saw benefit in having a shared superintendent who could inform them about what was happening in the other district as an advantage that they did not have in the past. Such insight into what was happening in other districts was viewed as a means of reassuring board members of their decision making process. The shared superintendent was viewed as the unification person to bring districts together and as a catalyst for planning the eventual unification process.

Interviewees identified many disadvantages for the shared superintendent position. The position was viewed as one of high stress and time demands. Virtually all the board presidents interviewed agreed that the shared superintendent position was a "burn out" position due to more board meetings, committee meetings, and overall running of two separate districts. There was indication that the lack of visibility and availability in the district was difficult for some communities and school personnel to accept. Hence, community and district personnel disenchantment was evident in some districts. Board presidents interviewed indicated that those districts who were purchasing the services of the other district's superintendent were at a disadvantage because of the time it took to establish a positive working relationship and trust. In some instances the communication within and between districts was not what it should have been and caused small problems which should have been handled with ease to turn into large problems which took a great deal more time to resolve. One-third of the participants perceived the whole process as a weakness, but they preferred sharing to district reorganization.

The Role of Support Staff

A common theme rendered by the board presidents was that the superintendent had became more of a delegator than a doer in relation to many curriculum and supervision responsibilities. The time constraint was too great for the shared superintendent to continue with such responsibilities. Building principals have assumed many duties formerly handled by the superintendent, including building maintenance, food service, and transportation. In many cases this was an entirely new role for the building principal. Some of these additional responsibilities were shared by others on the staff, causing board presidents to comment about the increased involvement of faculty and staff in decision making with respect

to matters that affect their assignment. Such forced sharing of duties and responsibilities by district personnel is viewed by some participants as helping move toward an educationally sound school district that will function effectively in the future.

Board Presidents' "Words of Wisdom"

All of the participants were eager to discuss their experience and were open to sharing their experiences with other board presidents who might find themselves in a similar situation. An overwhelming response was that both boards of education spend time together to determine compatibility of goals and expectations for a shared superintendent. It was recommended that a joint committee be established to identify and discuss issues and concerns related to the possibility of sharing a superintendent. Many of the board presidents interviewed also stressed the importance of employing strong, experienced principals who were able to manage a variety of situations when the superintendent was absent from the district. Virtually every board president interviewed stated that the principal's role increased (some more than others) and that the shared superintendent responsibilities were far greater in the management role than in leadership.

Characteristics of a Successful Shared Superintendent

Interviewees believe the productive shared superintendent is likely to be a well qualified person with 5-10 years of successful superintendent experience. s person should be able to take criticism, be a very good business manager, nd stand up for his/her beliefs. Organizational skills are very important as the shared superintendent will be stretched in work load and time commitment. The shared superintendent needs superior communication skills in order to work

with diverse groups and individuals with personal agendas. Many board president participants believed that the shared superintendent should be a younger person who is ambitious and energetic.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The shared superintendency is an emerging administrative phenomena which is increasing in numbers. Such positions have grown from 2 superintendents in the 1984-85 school year to 51 in the 1989-90 school year, with 55 or 56 shared superintendencies anticipated for the 1990-91 year. It is expected that approximately 25 percent of Iowa school districts will be sharing a superintendent for the 1990-91 school year. With this significant administrative undertaking in the state of Iowa, a body of knowledge has surfaced to further provide information for other rural districts whether in Iowa or across the nation. This study suggest:

* The majority of school districts now sharing a superintendent entered into such an arrangement for financial reasons.
* Twenty-six of the 83 participants (31%) indicated that there was no advantage associated with the shared superintendent position. The remaining 57 participants (69%) identified such advantages as cooperative purchasing, coordinating curriculum, and having a person who would share with each board a forward looking approach to improving education.
* Twenty-two different concerns were identified as weaknesses. Every participant identified at least three weaknesses associated with the shared position. The most common weakness identified was the amount of time that it took to manage both districts. Other frequently mentioned weaknesses included the amount of travel as well as the

district's realization that they no longer had a full-time chief executive officer. For many districts these perceived weaknesses could very well be the fatal flaws for the continued practice of shared administration.

* Ninety-four percent of the participants indicated the need for strong building principals and other central staff to support the shared superintendent position.
* Every board president participant was eager to give advice to others about what should be done prior to entering into a shared superintendent arrangement. Many participants indicated the need for board committee work to negotiate the particular issues, and concerns prior to the full board becoming involved in finalizing the agreement.
* Characteristics most commonly identified as desirable for a shared superintendent included an individual who was younger, energetic, aggressive, willing to take criticism, and a good communicator.
* Sixty-two board president participants (75%) indicated that the shared superintendent had become more of a manager than a leader. Many participants felt that the superintendent was geared to maintaining the "status quo." Given the parameters of the position, however, the participants were quick to admit that it was difficult to do anything but maintain the present educational program.
* Many board presidents suggested that it was important to provide inservice to principals and others who will assume new leadership responsibilities.

When these findings are compared with those from interviews conducted with 42 of 44 shared superintendents in Iowa (Decker and Talbot, 1989), one can draw

some conclusions about the shared superintendent position. Both groups of participants freely acknowledged that for the majority of school districts the chief reason for entering into such an arrangement was financial. Many districts saw the financial incentives as a way to help reduce administrative costs to the districts. The financial incentives was important only in those cases where one district was large enough and felt that they wanted to help a neighboring, financially struggling district. Even in these somewhat rare cases other reasons motivated the larger districts to become involved in the shared administrative arrangement. The ability to attract a smaller district to eventually merge and ensure the continued existence of the larger district. Also, larger district board presidents identified the advantage of improved course and program offerings that benefitted students as a reason for a district to be attracted to such an administrative venture.

Both superintendents and board presidents identified the difficulty local communities and district personnel had in adjusting to the fact that the superintendent was far less visible and accessible than had been the case in the past. The inability of the superintendent to participate in community events was a concern recognized by the majority of those who were interviewed. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that the superintendent lived in one district and, in many cases, was rarely seen in the neighboring district. This was frequently a major concern for the district purchasing the services of the superintendent from the neighboring district.

The demands of time and energy on the superintendent were identified by both groups. The shared superintendent works an average of 70 hours per week in district related responsibilities. Each group interviewed agreed that if the two communities were not supportive of some type reorganization, the shared superintendency was a very undesirable position. Ninety-three percent of the

shared superintendents interviewed said that some type of whole-grade sharing or reorganization would have to result within 3 to 5 years or they would no longer wish to be involved in such an administrative arrangement. Fifty-two percent of the board presidents felt that something had to happen within the 3 to 5 year period. Board presidents were more satisfied with maintaining the shared superintendent position if it was the vehicle from which the district would not have to reorganize or consolidate.

The importance of clarifying the expectations of both boards prior to agreeing to the shared superintendent position was recognized by both groups. Each was emphatic about the importance of discussing the differences that result as a consequence of employing a part-time superintendent. Superintendents believed it was important to have a serious discussion with both boards of education regarding the managerial, political, and social realities associated with such an administrative arrangement. Board presidents acknowledged the importance of having open and frank discussions with the other board, and viewed the discussion and pending agreement as a way of developing a vision for the future.

Both board presidents and superintendents believed that the most successful individuals for the position were those who had considerable experience in the superintendent position. The most successful experiences to date were reported by those individuals who had spent considerable time as the superintendent in one of the districts that was considering sharing. They believed that the longevity of the individual was helpful in establishing a favorable reputation as a known commodity. Such knowledge minimized suspicions and resulted in a more favorable and rewarding experience for all concerned.

Similarities exist between superintendent and board presidents perceptions of the shared superintendent position. Additional research must be conducted

to provide data that can assist those responsible for designing and implementing better, more efficient administrative and educational programs for students of the 21st century. Based upon the results reported here, a fundamental question remains to be answered: researchers need to determine are shared superintendencies in the best interest of current as well as future education, or are they stop gap economic, political maneuvers that will fail to guide education into the future. Rural areas of Iowa and the rest of the nation should carefully examine the realities of Iowa's experience and weigh the perceived and reported results against the best interest of a child's education. There are clearly some reported advantages to the shared superintendency as well as some direct disadvantages. It is obvious that additional research needs to be conducted to determine:

* the impact of shared superintendencies on the role of the building principal,
* administrative practices that have the greatest impact on attitudes, knowledge and behavior of students, staff, and community,
* whether the impact of shared superintendents varies by size, location, expenditure per child and other differences which exist among schools classified as small/rural,
* specific strategies that can be used to assist small/rural school districts in improving administrative efficiency while also maintaining an excellent educational program within the financial constraints of the local district.

These are only a few of the important issues related to shared administrative positions. The large number of schools across our nation and the future of students in these schools suggest that we cannot ignore the need for information about how to effectively administer and provide educationally sound

programs in rural areas. Answers to these questions about how to design and deliver quality, cost-effective schools in sparsely populated areas is important for the future of small/rural schools.

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